

Decide...Now

What would you rather follow: Man's invented religion, your own convincing feelings, or G-d's words? There is no better time than right now for determining which one is the truth. But be careful not to delay, the present soon becomes what was "your life".

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JewishTimes

Volume III, No. 27...May 7, 2004

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IN THIS ISSUE:

PARASHAS EMOR	1,3,4
ARROGANCE & SUICIDE: (REPERCUSSIONS OF SUBJECTIVISM)	1,5,6
SPIRITUALITY:	1,2
DO WE POSSESS IT?	

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Weekly Parsha

Emor

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And Hashem said to Moshe, “Speak to the Kohanim – the children of Ahron – and say to them that no priest should defile himself through contact with the dead from among his people.” (VaYikra 21:1)

(continued on page 3)

Spirituality Do We Possess It?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

A friend was describing for me his concept of “spirituality”. As is the case with all concepts, a true idea must be reasonable, and Torah ideas, well, must be found in Torah. The questions are: What is meant by “spirituality”? Is his idea (presented below) truth? And is it part of Torah?

My friend’s position is that there may be two people with identical Torah backgrounds, (which I disagree can ever be measured) and although identical in wisdom, each will choose divergent paths: one to righteousness, and one to wickedness. He posited that since their learning was identical (although he has not proven this) the cause for their different paths is from another source, he suggested “spirituality” was that source. This is why, according to him, each selected different life-courses; their spiritual natures were different.

If this is so, my friend suggests something outside one’s own free will is causing his sin or merit. In such a case, neither could be rewarded or punished. This is a problem according to Judaism, as reward and punishment forms a fundamental tenet. It is also one of Maimonides’ 13 Principles. When questioned whether someone can be spiritual without having knowledge,

(continued on next page)



Belshatzar "exalting himself against the Lord of heaven", drinking to gods of silver and gold from the Temple's vessels. His arrogance brought him his murder. (Daniel, 5:23)

ARROGANCE & SUICIDE

Repercussions of Subjectivism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Over these past few weeks, I have had a number of discussions. They spanned Reformed, Conservative, Gentile, and non-religious by choice. Our discussions yielded ideas applicable to many others. I have paraphrased our discussions below, while embellishing my own research and thoughts. I commence with one position, that spirituality means more than rigorous, adherence to the Torah’s specific laws. Additional positions are then taken up:

Reader: In my Temple, I am not so fond of the rabbi and the cantor; I don’t get a feeling I’m looking for.

Mesora: You’re suggesting that Temple services are to serve the purpose of validating your preconceived notions of Judaism? You want to remain with a certain feeling, and seek Temple to sustain this for you?

(continued on page 5)

(Spirituality continued from page 1)

he acquiesced that knowledge is indispensable to spirituality - contradicting his previous position.

But we must ask: what does he mean by "spiritual"? What component in man is being spiritual?

There is a discreet number of faculties man possesses, and in every faculty, there is a limit: Man has five senses, and no more. Each sense functions only so far. For example, strength is a faculty of man, and this very faculty has a measure, i.e., man cannot lift a house. Another faculty is vision, but man is limited, and cannot see molecules, nor in complete darkness, nor distant objects. Not only in man's physical make up is this so, but also in his non-physical make up, i.e., his instincts and his intelligence. An example: man's mind is limited, and can only ponder matters connected to sense perceptions. Therefore, man cannot read another person's mind. Another person's thoughts are not perceptible by the senses, (only by that person's intellect) so we cannot mind-read. Similarly, I cannot determine what is in a closed box. Without the aid of vision there is nothing perceptible about the box's contents. Vision cannot penetrate a solid, opaque substance, and prevents any knowledge of the contents.

We conclude thus far, that man has a limited scope of function: he cannot act outside of his limitations, and his areas of function are confined to either the five senses (physical), or thought and emotions (non-physical). It may be accurately said of man that he is both physical - having limited affect on the physical, and that he also is a thinking creature, partaking of wisdom which is not physical. Man has no other capacities.

So the question is, what is "spirituality", and if this is a true idea, in which of man's faculties does spirituality belong? We must first define spirituality, then, see if it belongs to man's workings. Additionally, do we see such a concept in the Torah?

Returning to my friend's opinion: two people with identical wisdom may "know" something is evil, yet, one selects to act, and the other to

abstain. My friend ascribes this difference to different levels of "spirituality". But I must disagree. We already demonstrated all of man's capacities, and have not detected any 'spirituality'. There is nothing available to man other than his physical capacities, or his intellectual and emotional capacities. "Spirituality", used as my friend suggests, invents a new capacity in man. He says that aside from wisdom, emotions and senses, there is something else.

But let us think into the matter ourselves: why did these two people select different paths? It would appear that there are two possibilities why someone knowingly does that which is evil: 1) He does not view the act as evil, or 2) One knows clearly that something is wrong or evil, but he justifies it, as when one says, "I must steal, how else will I eat?" In the first case, lack of knowledge is the reason why he sins, and in the second case, again it is a lack of knowledge, as justification means one "distorts wrong into good based on subjective morality." In both cases, one is not in line with good values due to a lack of knowledge; he either is ignorant of that knowledge, or he allows his emotions to distort his knowledge. What is the cure? In both cases, a clear understanding of the evil will eliminate his option to do evil. So one becomes more in line with the good, or as I will define "spiritual",

when he becomes perfected, when he gains or clarifies his knowledge. I have no issue using the term "spiritual", but it must refer to something real in man. Being spiritual is: being in line with truth. It is not separate from man's intellect.

Maimonides' principle that "in accordance with one's knowledge is his love of G-d" underlines man's primary goal of drawing closer to G-d. Maimonides teaches that this is achieved only through increased knowledge. My friend's position was in disagreement with Maimonides. My friend felt that aside from knowledge, there is something called "spirituality". I still fail to understand to what he refers. Man functions by his emotions, or his intelligence, and through the senses - he has no other faculty. To suggest there is yet another aspect of man called his "spirituality" is baseless. If however my friend would say otherwise, that spirituality is in fact man's use of his intelligence to draw close to G-d, then he has said something accurate, as this is in line with what we see in within man's abilities. In his scenario, the cause for each person selecting a different choice is not due to a new creation called spirituality, but it is due to the varying levels of intellectual clarity. When man sees something is 100% evil, he cannot do that act. It is against man's nature to harm himself. If in truth, two people had the same level of

knowledge, and the same clarity, they would act the same. But you may ask, what if one had stronger emotions, would this not enter the equation? The answer is of course yes. In such a case, the one with stronger emotions would have to work on his emotions, subjugating them to his intellect. Then, these two people would not be the same.

Free will is denied when we suggest spirituality refers to another, imagined part of man. Reward and punishment as well cannot be a correct system, as man has not selected evil or good through his intellect, but this thing called spirituality.

In truth, man selects the good or the evil as outlined in our Torah, based on his knowledge and his emotions. There is nothing else in man. With greater knowledge, man naturally draws closer to that which he sees as "truth". G-d designed us for success, not failure. Therefore, our intellects are more powerful than our emotions. As Maimonides stated, "In accord with one's knowledge is his love for G-d". This means his love for truth, and his avoidance of evil.

To accurately state that man is more "spiritual" than another, means that he sees more truth than another and acts upon this truth. Nothing can function outside of its design, man included. Man's mark of distinction is his intellect, his soul. "Spirit" can only refer to what man possesses. □

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Parashas Emor

RABBI BERNARD FOX

This passage introduces the Torah's discussion of various restrictions upon the Kohanim. One of these restrictions regulates the Kohen's contact with dead bodies. In general, the Kohen is not permitted to defile himself through association with a dead body. There are exceptions to this prohibition. The restriction does not apply to the body of a close relative. The Kohen is allowed become defiled through associating with these remains.

Gershonides discusses the defilement associated with dead bodies. He offers a simple explanation of this tumah – defilement. He explains that a human being consists of a spiritual soul combined with a material body. The soul differentiates the human from other material creations. This spiritual element is the distinguishing characteristic of the human being. This element is the source of human perfection and all virtue. With death, the spiritual element is separated from the material element. The dead body is the material remainder. The Torah assigns tumah to the body. This tumah communicates that the foundation of human perfection and virtue has departed from the body. The material element, alone, is meaningless.[1]

As explained above, there are exceptional instances in which the Kohen may associate himself with a dead body. In these cases, the Kohen is permitted to defile himself. Primarily, these exceptions allow contact with the body of a close relative. However, there is an additional exception. The Kohen may associate with a mait mitzvah – an abandoned body. There are no relatives to bury this body. The Kohen is permitted to defile himself in order to assure that the body is properly interred.

This law is derived from a very interesting source. The Torah commands us to bury those executed by the courts.[2] Even the bodies of these evil individuals must be treated with respect and properly interred. It follows that we must treat the dead body of a good person with the same dignity.[3] Therefore, the entire community is charged with the duty of burying a mait mitzvah. Even the Kohen is permitted to defile himself to perform this mitzvah.

The dead body is associated with tumah. This communicates the worthlessness of the material element of the human being when separated from the spiritual soul. Yet, the Torah commands us to treat these remains with the utmost respect and dignity. These seem to be contradictory and confusing messages. We are taught, through the

symbolic message of tumah, that the dead body is a meaningless remnant. It is bereft of its virtue. It is an agent of tumah – defilement! The Torah also teaches us to treat this body with extreme deference. This implies that the remains retain significance and even sanctity!

In fact, these two attitudes are not contradictory. The Torah's treatment of the dead body provides an insight into the uniqueness of the Torah.

Over the ages, humanity has produced many systems of law. There are also a variety of religions and theologies. The Torah is derived from different source. It is the Almighty's revealed truth. We expect Hashem's law to bare marks of His wisdom. Our apparent paradox illustrates one of these expressions of Divine wisdom.

The Torah recognizes that human beings are guided by intellect and instinct. A comprehensive religious system must address both of these elements. The intellect must be taught and the instincts must be trained. Every religion teaches. The essential substance of a religion is its theology and world-view. These are the ideas it attempts to impart to its adherents. However, the instinctual component must also be treated seriously. Religion must incorporate a theory of psychology. Without psychology, the instincts are ignored. The religious practitioner remains a primitive.

We have discussed the important idea communicated by the tumah associated with the remains of the dead. This idea is addressed to the intellectual element of the human being. In contrast, the dignity with which the dead body is treated is designed to train the instincts. This mitzvah is an expression of the Torah's psychology.

What is the instinctual issue addressed by this law? We are required to treat each other with extreme deference. We may not physically harm another individual or damage another's property. We may not even speak poorly of others. These behaviors are counter to our basic instincts. We must train ourselves to adopt these behaviors. We must deal with our instincts. This requires a psychological approach to human behavior.

How are the instincts reformed? First, the same simple message must be constantly and clearly communicated. Through this repetition the instincts are influenced. Countless laws and teachings of the Torah emphasize the dignity of the human being. This provides constant reinforcement of the Torah's

lesson. Every human being is sacred.

Second, all contrary messages must be eliminated or minimized. In other words, behaviors that minimize the value of the human being must be discouraged. For this reason, the Torah insists that we respect the remains of the dead. Disrespect might communicate the wrong message to the instincts. The instincts do not recognize fine distinctions. The instincts do not necessarily recognize the difference between the treatment required of a human being and behavior displayed towards human remains. Disrespect towards human remains might undermine the Torah's emphasis on deference towards others.

“And to his virgin sister who is close to him, that is not married, for her he may become ritually unclean.” (VaYikra 21:3)

A Kohen is generally prohibited from becoming ritually unclean. This prohibition restricts a Kohen from contact with a dead body. There are exceptions to this restriction. A Kohen is required to bury and mourn a close relative. This obligation takes precedence over the restriction against spiritual impurity.

One of the positive commands of the Torah is to mourn close relatives. No passage in the Torah expressly states this mitzvah. Maimonides, in his Sefer HaMitzvot, explains that the command is derived from the obligation of the Kohen to become spiritually unclean in order to bury and mourn a close relative. He explains that the mitzvah of mourning is expressed in reference to the Kohen in order to stress the importance of the command. A Kohen is generally prohibited from becoming spiritually unclean. Yet, in order to honor the deceased this restriction is abrogated. Certainly, a Jew who is not restricted in becoming ritually unclean must properly care for and mourn the departed! Maimonides cites our pasuk as the source of the positive command to mourn.[4]

In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides discusses the laws of mourning in detail. In the second chapter of the laws of mourning he mentions our pasuk. He explains that this pasuk obligates the Kohen to become spiritually unclean.[5] However, it is interesting that in introducing the command to mourn Maimonides cites a different passage. In order to understand the pasuk Maimonides chooses,

(continued on next page)

Parashas Emor

RABBI BERNARD FOX

a brief introduction is required.

The construction of the Mishcan was followed by a period of inauguration. The first seven days of this period Moshe served as the Kohen Gadol. Ahron assumed his duties as High Priest on the eighth day. On that first day of Ahron's service, his sons Nadav and Avihu died. Moshe instructed Ahron, that despite this tragedy, the service in the Mishcan should not be interrupted. Ahron and his sons should continue to perform their functions. Moshe discovered that although Ahron generally followed these instructions, he did deviate in one area. Ahron and the Kohanim had not eaten their assigned portion of the Chatat for the new month.

Moshe asked Ahron's sons Elazar and Itamar to explain this deviation. The Chumash relates Ahron's response. "And Ahron spoke to Moshe, 'Today they offered their chatat and their olah. And this happened to me. And if I ate the chatat, would this behavior be appropriate in Hashem's eyes?'"[6]

Ahron explained to Moshe that it was inappropriate for him and his sons to eat from the chatat. They were obligated to mourn the death of their close relatives. This obligation disqualified them from consuming the sacrifice.

Maimonides, in introducing the laws of mourning in the Mishne Torah, quotes Ahron's comment to Moshe.[7] Maimonides' intention is clear. Ahron indicated that the obligation to mourn disqualified him and his children from performing a duty of the Kohanim. This implies that the Torah recognizes the requirement to mourn as a mitzvah.

It is interesting that Maimonides cites our pasuk as the source for mourning in his Sefer HaMitzvot. However, in Mishne Torah Maimonides cites Ahron's response to Moshe!

There is a further difficulty in understanding Maimonides' position. In order to understand this difficulty, we must review some of the laws of mourning.

Mourning is expressed through various restrictions. Maimonides explains that there are eleven prohibitions. These include cutting one's hair, washing of clothing, and bathing. According to the Torah, these prohibitions apply for a single day. The Sages extended the period of mourning. In some cases, some degree of restriction extends for twelve months.[8]

When do these prohibitions begin? Maimonides explains that generally these restrictions begin with

the completion of the burial.[9] However, prior to the burial the restrictions associated with mourning do not apply.

On the day of the death and burial of a close relative one is defined as an onan.[10] The obligations of mourning do not apply until the completion of the burial. What, then, is the significance of the status of onan?

Maimonides explains that the onan status is relevant to Kohanim. A Kohen with the status of onan is disqualified from serving in the Mishcan or Bait HaMikdash.[11] A Kohen Gadol continues to serve as an onan. However, he may not eat from the sacrifices.[12]

We can now better understand Ahron's response to Moshe. Ahron told Moshe that he and his sons had the status of onan. This status disqualified them from consuming the sacrifice.[13]

This creates a new difficulty in understanding Maimonides' position. Maimonides, in Mishne Torah, cites Ahron's response as the Torah source for the mitzvah of mourning. Ahron was explaining his reason for not consuming the sacrifice. His reason was not because he was mourning. He was explaining that he and his sons had the status of onan! In short, this passage is not a reference to mourning. It is a source for the status of onan!

In order to answer these questions, we must consider the nature of mourning as conceived by the Torah. Mourning involves various restrictions. However, are these prohibitions the essence of the mourning experience? Maimonides, in the laws of mourning, does not enumerate the specific restriction until the fifth chapter. It would seem that these prohibitions are not the fundamental feature of the mitzvah. Instead, the essential aspect of mourning is the sense of loss and the contemplation of the meaning of the tragedy. The restrictions give visible expression to mourning. They do not define the experience.

The restrictions do not begin until the completion of the burial process. This does not mean that mourning has not begun. The essential element of mourning is the internal aspect – the sense of loss. This element of the mourning begins immediately. From this perspective, the status of onan is an expression of the mitzvah of mourning. The onan is not obligated in the restrictions associated with mourning. However, the onan is subject to the internal aspect of mourning.

We can now readily understand the effect of the status of onan upon the Kohen. The onan is preoccupied with the death of a close relative. This internal upheaval disqualifies the Kohen from service and the Kohen Gadol from consuming sacrifices.

The status of onan is a form of mourning. It involves the essential element without the external expression of the prohibitions. Ahron's response to Moshe is an appropriate source for the mitzvah of mourning.

Maimonides cites Ahron's response to Moshe to introduce the mitzvah of mourning. This passage captures the essential nature of the mitzvah. Our pasuk indicates the existence of the mitzvah. But it tells us little of the nature of the command. Ahron's statement expresses the essence of mourning. It captures the internal aspect of the command. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1997), p 317.

[2] Sefer Devarim 21:23.

[3] Rav Ahron HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 537.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 37.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avel 2:6.

[6] Sefer VaYikra 11:19.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avel 1:1.

[8] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avel, Chapters 5 and 6.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avel 1:2.

[10] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bey'at HaMikdash 2:9.

[11] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bey'at HaMikdash 2:6.

[12] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bey'at HaMikdash 2:8.

[13] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bey'at HaMikdash 2:8.

(Arrogance & Suicide continued from page 1)

Reader: Yes, I feel Judaism is more about religious feeling than actions.

Mesora: But you have not - as of yet - attempted to discern whether your feelings are justified, or if they are truly in line with G-d's own words given on Sinai. Are you convinced that G-d exists, and that He gave a Torah to the Jews - the Torah we have today?

Reader: Yes.

Mesora: And that Moses and the Jews did not follow this Torah for thousands of years, had it been man made?

Reader: No, I was taught in my temple that only the Ten Commandments are G-d's words, and that Moses wrote the rest from his own mind.

Mesora: Then you aren't aware of the numerous cases, throughout the entire Five Books (the Torah) that it is written, "And G-d spoke to Moses saying." Had Moses written his own ideas, and not G-d's, why did Moses write just the opposite? But the proof is that Moses' face shined miraculously from Sinai, until he died. This miracle is an outright endorsement by the One who makes miracles, that Moses was being truthful when he said G-d commanded the entire Torah, not just the Ten Commandments. Your rabbis teach you a flagrant denial of G-d's words.

Reader: OK, well let's say they ARE G-d's words. But yet, we must adapt it for our times. Would G-d prefer that I stay home on shabbos, because to get the Temple I need to drive? Or doesn't G-d prefer that I drive, so I can be in Temple?

Mesora: The fact that you are asking, demonstrates that you are unsure yourself. Additionally, your words "adapt it for our times", assumes that G-d lacked the foresight to know what Torah requires, so as to remain absolutely applicable in all generations.

But your position is clear; Temple attendance outweighs Shabbos laws. However, this is incorrect. Your approach to truth is flawed. The only way to come to the truth of what G-d truly desires, is by studying His Torah. Had you studied, this would be absolutely clear. Additionally, sustaining "feelings" is not the goal of the Torah. Torah is a means by which in-depth study is a prerequisite for our actions. The study gives us insight and joy into the world of G-d's perfect and absolute wisdom, and our actions are the barometer by which we display our convictions in such ideas. Therefore, "feelings" or even thoughts bereft of action, lack conviction.

Temple is not to afford you some good feeling, as you have it, although good feelings accompany anyone performing G-d's word, understanding and appreciating those perfecting qualities, and ideas.

Reader: But that is so restrictive, and you are being very intolerant.

Mesora: Is not your position equally restricted by its parameters? And yes, I am intolerant of what is not truth. You should strive to be the same way. Such intolerance is a good thing, as it will steer you clear of fallacy.

However, by such accusations, you remain in your same error; assuming that your feelings of "tolerance" are a good value, and you are to be justified by your own, subjective "Torah performances". But the reverse is true: one must change

themselves to conform to G-d's singular reality, i.e., the Torah. This is how one will truly be happy, and how one truly adheres to G-d's words. Who knows what is better for man: us, or the One who created us?

Commencing with what you feel is correct, is a denial that G-d knows better. You may seek certain feelings, but if these feelings are not G-d's desires, then you seek something other than G-d's Torah. Realize that G-d Himself did not suggest as you do. He stated that adherence to law is mandatory, and one may not simply replace "feelings" with actions. Many times I hear the position, "All G-d wants is that we are good, and kind to others." Well, if that was all G-d wanted, His Torah would have been much smaller. G-d's words contradict your position.

There are severe penalties for one who violates Torah, and acts when he shouldn't, or is passive when action is demanded. According to you, your feelings outweigh G-d's prescription. But according to G-d, you might violate that which is punishable by death.

You mention that the laws are restrictive. Yes, by definition, a law restricts or permits. This is what law means. Do you not obey the requirements of your employer? Isn't this a restriction? You must arrive at 9am, and not leave until 6pm. Yet, you do not complain about this restriction.

Reader: But that is so I can pay my bills. What should I do, not work?!

Mesora: I am simply pointing out that you really do not oppose restrictions per se, except when it is uncomfortable with your desires. You admittedly observe work restrictions, but you violate G-d's restrictions in His Torah. Another example will better illustrate the underlying flaw: people will meticulously adhere to a doctor's prescription. A doctor may say, "Take these 10 pills each day for the rest of your life, and you will live in full health. But miss one day, or one pill on any day, and you will die." Would you deviate from such a prescription?

Reader: Of course not.

Mesora: What do you mean by "of course" not?

Reader: I mean, my life is not something I tamper with. I don't want to die. Isn't that obvious?

Mesora: Yes, it is obvious. And so also, it should now be obvious to you that you place greater value on your physical life, than on your soul. You won't risk physical death, and will adhere exactly to the doctor's prescription. Why then, in matters of the soul, that which far outlives the body, do you follow your ignorance, instead of again listening to the "Doctor", I mean G-d?

This is where you must start your self-examination: with your belief that the body is more important to you than your soul. You must correct this notion; otherwise, all of your opinions will be based on this inverted value system. Until you understand with clarity, that the real "self" is the soul, which may live eternally, you will make all decisions based on an overestimation of the 'expiring' body. One, whose arrogance causes him to value the body over the soul, is suicidal in the truest sense - he forfeits his soul.

Ironically, you will be surprised to learn that G-d's knowledge of all generations, which you previously denied, already anticipated and addressed your philosophy of "doing what feels good".

(continued on next page)

"And it will be when one hears the words of this curse, and he will bless (himself) in his heart saying, 'I will have tranquility, for in the desires of my heart do I go', thereby adding the watered to the thirsty. G-d will not be willing to forgive him..."

(Arrogance & Suicide continued from previous page)

In Deuteronomy, 29:18-20 after hearing the extensive curses met with a Torah violator, G-d describes a certain personality:

“And it will be when one hears the words of this curse, and he will bless (himself) in his heart saying, ‘I will have tranquility, for in the desires of my heart do I go’, thereby adding the watered to the thirsty (“Sins done accidentally be rendered as willful.” -Rashi.) G-d will not be willing to forgive him, for then G-d’s anger and jealousy will smoke against that man, and all the curses written in this book will come down upon him, and G-d will erase his name from under the heaven. G-d will set him aside for evil from all the tribes of Israel, in accordance with all the curses of the treaty written in this book of Torah.”

Who is the person described herein? What is meant by, “I will have tranquility, for in the desires of my heart do I go”? Rashi comments, this refers to one who follows “what his heart sees to do.” One blesses himself, feeling he will be vindicated. This is so commonplace today. People preach a religious practice containing not 613 commands, but just one, “G-d wants us to do what is good”, or, “G-d knows I am doing my best”. If G-d held that one cannot be responsible, except to do his subjective “best”, G-d would not have commanded us in an “objective” system, obligatory upon all. G-d does not impose on man, the impossible. His Torah system is well within our capabilities, and is the best life. It is the ignorant ones who have yet to see the value of Torah who create such positions.

People gravely distort and diminish Judaism, down to a practice that really does sound acceptable! Who could blame such a “righteous” person who lives by this motto, “Just do what is good in your heart”? The answer: G-d can blame him. G-d, in His knowledge of the past and future, anticipated this error, and included it in His Torah. And what an error it is. Not only is such a person sinning with his grave distortion of Judaic philosophy, but also all previous accidental sins are rendered to him as purposeful! Why must this be? Where is the justice in G-d rendering my sins – performed in ignorance – as willfully perpetrated? Additionally, why am I not “forgiven”, “erased from under the heavens”, and “meet with all these curses”?

One thing we see: this “innocent” philosophy is just the opposite; it is one of the worst crimes, as all evil is justly measured by G-d in proportion to its punishment. And the punishments here are severe.

Let us understand the facts: this person affords himself security (“I will have tranquility...”) for something he must be insecure about. What is his insecurity? He knowingly violates the Torah! If he was not knowingly violating, he need not reassure himself of anything, as there would be no fear. However, his underlying sin is not simply violating G-d’s words – all sins contain this flaw. Here, there is something specific: this sinner holds the conviction that what his inner emotions dictate, is how reality is: “My own feelings cannot be wrong” is what he says to himself. His crime is “subjectivism”. This is the sin of today’s teachers of Conservative and Reformed Judaism, possessing full knowledge that Orthodox Judaism predated those imitations, and thus, must be the original, by definition. (I wonder how those two imitations explain our verses.)

This explains why previous, “accidental” sins are now rendered

as “willful”, and deserving of greater punishment: his sins are by ‘design’, and not truly accidental! His words testify to a “conscious lifestyle” – his errors are based on a selected philosophy, not mere results of temporal, emotional flare-ups. If the latter, he would be considered as sinning accidentally. But once someone selects a “philosophy”, that “I go in the feelings of my heart”, he now takes the position that he argues on G-d’s words, and “all” of his sins are viewed as purposeful.

This lifestyle can destroy Judaism. If all Jews would act out what is subjective in their own hearts, there would no longer be a consistent religion practiced by all Jews. Of course, it wouldn’t even be Judaism anymore once it was altered. This corrupt lifestyle condones “subjective practice”, identical with Reformed Judaism’s tenets.

What is G-d’s response? He insures the preservation of authentic Judaism. How does G-d achieve this? Such a person or family is met with the curses, thereby validating G-d’s words not to alter Judaism! Whose words end up standing? G-d’s words are validated. The person/family is seen to be met with horrific curses outlined in the Torah, his deviation thereby becomes known, and G-d’s promises of cursing such a person are fulfilled. Ultimately, G-d erases his name from under the heavens so no others may be misled. Fear is instilled in others, and the reality of the Torah’s words is seen clearly.

But why does G-d not forgive such a sin? What exists in this sin over all others, that warrants no forgiveness? Let us be mindful that in specific, this person denies these curses, and feels secure that his internal and subjective lifestyle is approved by G-d.

I believe the answer to be enlightening, and perfect. The specific crime committed, was a “crime against the system of reward and punishment”. For his actions contrary to Torah, this sinner held (in his heart) that no punishments would be meted out to him. He openly denies G-d’s words saying, “One who violates the Torah laws cited therein, would not meet with the punishments”. Now, if he goes Scott-free, it will appear that he is right, and G-d’s word is wrong. What must happen in this instance is what G-d says, that the person will not be forgiven and will be punished. For if he is forgiven and receives no punishment, G-d will appear as a liar. In other words, when the violation is a “denial of G-d’s punishments”, no removal of these punishments is tenable, if G-d’s word is to be upheld. In such a rare case, forgiveness is not an option. And this is justly so, as the Torah does not hide the ultimate punishment from this sinner. He is well aware of G-d’s fatal measures.

As was the case with Pharaoh, G-d withholds repentance because one can “go too far”. There is a “point of no return”. In our case, forgiveness is withheld, for another consideration: that G-d’s system retains its truth.

We conclude that man commits one of his greatest sins when he espouses the life of “going by his heart.” Claiming such an arrogant position, that one knows better than G-d, is true suicide, as you forfeit your soul. The repercussions of subjectivism are fatal.

In this portion of our Torah, G-d corrects man’s errors, and He did so long before man made them. Also teaching that the Torah does not require “updates” as suggested by the Reformed and Conservative movements. The converse is true: we must update ourselves to be in line with G-d’s infinite wisdom. Now doesn’t that sound a bit more reasonable? ■